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What happened?

On the evening of 9 November, three almost simultaneous suicide bomb explosions targeted hotels managed by US companies in the Jordanian capital Amman. These attacks marked the end of Jordan's long track-record of foiling large-scale terrorist atrocities before being carried out. At around 2050hrs local time, the Grand Hyatt, the Radisson SAS, and Days Inn hotel, all in the centre of Amman, were hit by what appear to be two individual suicide bombers on foot and a third vehicle borne device. The latest official figures state that 56 people were killed and over 300 wounded. The most devastating attack took place at the Radisson SAS where the bomber walked into a packed banqueting hall during a wedding reception and detonated his or her payload amid 280 celebrating people.

Who is responsible?

In a statement released on Thursday on an Islamist site frequently used by AQ Iraq, a spokesman claiming to be from the group announced that it had carried out the triple bomb attacks on the three Amman hotels:

"A group of our best lions launched a new attack on some dens [...] After casing the targets, some hotels were chosen which the Jordanian despot turned into a backyard for the enemies of the faith, the Jews and crusaders."

The message could not be immediately verified; however the operation does bear the signature of al-Qaeda:

- Nearly simultaneous, multiple detonations;
- Utilising suicide bombers;
- Aimed at soft targets – busy, exclusive, Western owned hotels;
- Designed to cause enormous disruption and mass casualties;
- Designed to maximise the spread of fear and unsettle the country's economy at a delicate time. The Jordanian economy has benefited strongly from the US invasion of Iraq. Furthermore tourism, once the lynchpin of the Jordanian economy, had also begun to show good signs of recovery following the post 9/11 slump. These latest attacks will certainly place the country under near-term economic stress. The extent of this damage will be determined by whether there are any follow-up attacks;
- The attacks hit soft, symbolic targets at a strategically symbolic time: Jordan is regarded by al-Qaeda as having an apostate leadership, it is regarded as the gateway to Iraq and had just announced that it was increasing its diplomatic representation in Baghdad.

The Jordanian government has this morning

confirmed that two of the three bombers were Iraqi, adding further credibility to the AQ Iraq claim.

Why Jordan?

Geographically and politically Jordan occupies a strategically important position, squeezed between Israel, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. For many years the country has enjoyed very good military, political and economic ties with the West, and in particular the United States and the United Kingdom - first under King Hussein and now under his son King Abdullah. The US Embassy in Jordan is one of the largest in the Middle East, reflecting the country's geopolitical significance, and particularly its importance as a hub for US espionage operations in the region. Recent media reports have suggested that an interrogation facility in the Jordanian desert is a key piece in the international infrastructure developed by the US in prosecuting its Global War on Terror.



What's more, Jordan's healthy diplomatic relations with Israel (one of only three Arab countries to maintain overt diplomatic relations) has meant that the country has long been in the Islamist militant firing line. Since 'Black September' in 1970 when the Palestinian movement almost took over the kingdom, Jordan has been the US' firmest, longest and most effective regional partner in the war on terror. In addition,

Amman is a busy capital city which has, over the last 2 years, experienced an economic and development boom, fuelled in large part by money flowing into and out of, Iraq. Amman has become a vital staging post for government and business projecting into Iraq, and a safe haven for wealthy and middle class Iraqis desperate to escape the increasingly indiscriminate violence in their home country. It presented and continues to present an irresistible target to Jihadists in general, and those emanating from Iraq in particular.

Wednesday's statement from al-Qaeda in Iraq elaborates on the motivations for the attack:

"These hotels were chosen because they became the favourite place for American and Israeli intelligence and other western European governments to carry out their invisible attacks which they call the war on terror... Egyptian, Palestinian Authority, Saudi and Jordanian spies also operated there to plot against the mujahideen (holy warriors) in Palestine and Iraq...The hotels are also a safe haven for the infidel Iraqi government to live and hold meetings after our fire has burned their Green Zone"

So it should be no surprise than an attack of this sort has taken place in Amman. For many analysts, including our own, the real surprise is that it took so long for such a large-scale attack to occur in Jordan. One of the first serious terrorist attacks of the insurgency in Iraq was against the Jordanian Embassy, in August 2003. Eleven people were killed in that attack, which was believed to be in retaliation for the decision by King Abdullah to allow two of Saddam's daughters asylum in Jordan. The idea of attacking Jordanian interests is therefore not a new development in the twists and turns of the war in Iraq. Indeed, nor is attacking inside Jordan, as this August's rocket attack in Aqaba demonstrated. There has long been a sense among the Jordanian population and security analysts alike, that a successful attack against the country was simply a matter of time. Amman's hotels are so clearly the soft underbelly of the Iraq reconstruction effort.

Who was responsible?

The prime suspect and arguably the most powerful contemporary figure in the al-Qaeda organisation, at least on an operational level, is Jordanian-born, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Although

he has in recent years operated almost exclusively in Iraq, he has a long history of terrorist involvement in Jordan:

- 1991:** Zarqawi returns to Jordan from Afghanistan, where he has fought against the Soviet Union.
- 1992:** Zarqawi is arrested in Jordan for planning to overthrow the Jordanian government.
- 1999:** Zarqawi is released in an amnesty by the Jordanian government and flees to Afghanistan and establishes a terrorist camp near Heart.
- 2001:** Zarqawi flees Afghanistan and moves to Iran.
- 2002:** Zarqawi is expelled from Iran and relocates to Iraq.
- 2002:** The CIA foils a plan by Zarqawi's group to carry out poison attacks in several European capitals.
- 2002 (December):** US diplomat Lawrence Foley is murdered in Amman in a crime which Jordanian officials say was carried out by al-Qaeda and included the involvement of Zarqawi.
- 2003:** Zarqawi forms al-Tawhid wal Jihad and begins a terrorist campaign against multinational forces in Iraq and their Shi'ite and Kurd allies.
- 2004 (April):** Two Jordanians confess on Jordanian television of plotting bomb and poison gas attacks on the US Embassy, the Jordanian prime minister's office, the Jordanian intelligence service, and various other diplomatic missions. One of the Jordanians states that he had met with Zarqawi in Iraq to plan the attack and that he had provided him with \$170,000 to finance the operation. This sum was used to buy 20 tons of chemicals.
- 2004 (May):** In a videotape a masked man claiming to be Zarqawi beheads Nicholas Berg.

Before Iraq, Zarqawi - like so many before Al Qaeda inspired the creation of an international jihad movement - was interested in the overthrow of his home government in favour of an Islamic state. When he engaged in international terrorism, he chose Amman as a stage for the assassination of a US diplomat. The inevitability of Zarqawi's organisation returning to Jordan was almost palpable.

It is estimated that hundreds of militants from Jordan have streamed into Iraq to fight under

the banner of Zarqawi. 'Blowback' has been a growing concern since the extremist insurgency in Iraq began to gather momentum in 2004. It has always been our view that some Jordanian extremists, energised by the experience of fighting jihad in Iraq, and with newly honed skills, would return to attack the Hashemite Kingdom. Just such 'blowback' occurred for the first time in August of this year, with a rocket attack which targeted US warships in the Red Sea port of Aqaba. Jordanian authorities blamed the act on Iraqi militants from the al-Qaeda in Iraq group. The rockets missed the two US warships docked in the port; one hit a warehouse killing a Jordanian soldier while another landed across the border in the neighbouring Israeli resort of Eilat. Zarqawi's AQ Iraq group later claimed responsibility.

Why now?

There have been several recent indications that a large-scale move against Jordan was imminent. There have been perhaps two indicators of primary concern; the first is strategic and the second tactical.

In October the US published a letter supposedly from Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri to Zarqawi in Iraq. The letter was intercepted by US forces this summer. In it, Zawahiri lists four steps to achieving al-Qaeda's regional goals and sees Zarqawi as central to the group's plans. It is the third step which might offer the key strategic reason for the Amman bombings. Step three charges Zarqawi with: 'extending the Jihad wave to countries neighbouring Iraq'. This will not only have further focussed Zarqawi's attention on Jordan, it will have also rallied other extremists inside Jordan to the cause.

There is perhaps another, more immediate, tactical reason for Wednesday's bombings:

At the end of last week, a web posting appeared on a well known extremist site, it was signed by AQ Iraq and warned all foreign diplomats to leave the country: 'We reiterate our warning to those who insist on maintaining so-called diplomatic missions in Baghdad'. The statement accused Washington's, 'small agents in the region' of maintaining diplomatic missions in Baghdad in order 'to grant political and security backing that would provide legitimacy' to the Iraqi government. 'Let them pack their bags and leave [...] And let them know that we do not make any difference between the head of the mission and

the smallest employee as long as they have agreed to [...] back the criminal government of the (Shi'ites) and their American master'.

Over the past couple of years, extremist groups in Iraq have proved themselves very adept at publicising their causes, issuing threats and propaganda. AQ Iraq has proved particularly media savvy. This statement as with many others was signed by, 'the military wing of the al-Qaeda Organisation in the Land of the Two Rivers'. It was addressed 'to those who still do not understand and challenge the will of the muja-hideen (fighters), and especially the missions of countries which have pledged to cooperate with the (Iraqi) apostate government installed by the invading Crusaders [...] We will not spare any effort in tracking them down and punishing them, whoever they are and wherever they are, just as we have done with their predecessors'.



Just a few hours before the explosions in Amman we received reports that a local Amman radio station had stated Jordan's brave intention to send its Ambassador to Iraq into Baghdad over the next two weeks.

Could it have been prevented?

The Jordanian intelligence service - the General Intelligence Department [GID] has a reputation as an effective organisation, and the vanguard of Jordan's protection against terrorism. Simultaneously, the security forces maintain a strong and visible presence in Amman. In the main, however, overt security presence is little more than symbolic reassurance. Although there are soldiers or police standing guard outside most of the top hotels in the city, until now very few physical checks have been carried out.

During the two weeks before the Aqaba attacks, and also in their immediate aftermath, there was a noticeable increase in security outside hotels and shopping malls in the capital. Jordanian security forces were obviously reacting to specific intelligence regarding the increased threat of

attack. This time they seem to have been caught unaware. It has been noticeable that over recent weeks the security level and state of readiness appeared to have been lowered.

Of course, it is almost impossible to guard against suicide bomb attacks using purely physical security measures. Suicide bombers and their controllers are highly motivated, determined and tenacious; they will overcome all but the most extreme security measures. Jordanian senior security officials will necessarily be forced to ask themselves whether an intelligence-led, open society approach to security was the right choice, and whether it is now sustainable. Our view is that, given the nature of the suicide terrorism threat, Jordan should redouble its commitment to intelligence-led counterterrorism. Inevitably though, we are likely to see increased screening of people and vehicles at likely target locations.

In the latest reports, a disturbing revelation has begun to emerge from eye-witness accounts that point to the fact the third bomber (a man of foreign, Arab appearance), at the Days Inn Hotel, had initially attempted to detonate his explosive vest in the bar after ordering an orange juice. When it failed to explode, he quickly left the building only to return fifteen minutes later for another attempt, this time successful. If these accounts prove true, then they reveal a significant security breakdown in the city. There is no point in having what frequently appears to be an omniscient and overt security presence in Amman, if it cannot perform its duties when given ample opportunity to do so. We can expect a security shake-up in the coming days and weeks.

Janusian's Advice to Clients and Colleagues

We consider the following security measures should be implemented as a consequence of the attacks:

- Janusian personnel have been instructed to stay overnight at our own accommodation in Amman, rather than at hotels. We advise our clients to follow suit, or least to seek out less prominent hotels, until security measures at Western hotels have bedded down and can be assessed. We are happy to advise on alternative locations in direct communication with clients.

- It is reasonable to assume that there is significant threat of further attacks, which may well focus upon tourism targets (including hotels, bars, restaurants, and transport), the business community or diplomatic facilities. Consideration should be given before visiting these locations, and colleagues informed before doing so.
- It is tempting to assume that Jordan is an oasis of calm, certainly for those travelling out from a stint in Iraq. As memories of the attacks fade, this perspective is bound to be commonplace once more. General security awareness should be increased and maintained, particularly for Iraqi and Western personnel. Jordan's involvement with Iraq is unlikely to change, so we must assume that there is a long term threat. In addition to bombings, the potential for future Lawrence Foley-style assassination attempts is real. After-dark movement should be undertaken cautiously, and any suspicious activity that may be reconnaissance or surveillance should be reported within your organisation or to the Jordanian authorities.
- In the hours following the attacks, communications to Jordan were problematic. Clients may wish to consider having satellite communications in place as an alternative. Also, clients may wish to ensure that travel rosters and monitoring systems are up to date, and emergency plans are in place.
- Given AQ Iraq's stated intention to target neighbouring countries, personnel operating across the region should be made aware of an increased threat at this time, and security measures enhanced. Janusian has particular concerns about Dubai, which has begun to replace Amman as the staging post for commercial air transport into Baghdad, and is an obvious, target-rich environment for jihadis associated with Iraq. We have long felt that Dubai, just like Amman, is an inevitable target for the future. Similarly, Lebanon is an area of continuing concern.

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